

Ex-Solicitor Named Counsel in Assassination Inquiry

By ANTHONY LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10—J. Lee Rankin, former Solicitor General of the United States, has been chosen as general counsel of the commission inquiring into President Kennedy's assassination.

The commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, announced the appointment today. Mr. Rankin is already at work on the job in his New York law office, studying the detailed Justice Department report submitted to the commission yesterday.

Mr. Rankin, who is 56 years old, served in the Justice Department through eight years of the Eisenhower Administration. Like Chief Justice Warren, he is a Republican; but, also like the Chief Justice, he is respected for his lack of partisanship.

He was Assistant Attorney General in charge of the department's Office of Legal Counsel from 1953 to 1956. Then, as Solicitor General, he had the job that many lawyers regard as the best in the Government—handling its business before the Supreme Court.

Active in Liberties Work

Since the change of Administrations in 1961, Mr. Rankin has been in private law practice in New York. He has been active in civil liberties matters.

As general counsel to the commission, Mr. Rankin will spend as near to full time as he can on its work. He will be paid, as a consultant, from the President's contingency fund.

He expects to come to Washington this weekend to pick out

an office. The General Services Administration is now looking for space.

Mr. Rankin will have other lawyers and a clerical staff to help him. He plans to borrow some persons from Government agencies and to hire some.

He said today that Chief Justice Warren had asked him to keep February in mind as a possible target date for a report. Mr. Rankin and the staff would undoubtedly do the drafting with the seven commission members making the final decisions.

But he made clear that the commission was not putting time ahead of the need for thoroughness in any report.

"It would be very dangerous," Mr. Rankin said, "for the commission to come out with a report before it has all the facts."

May Release F.B.I. Data

"The President and the Chief Justice want to get it resolved as soon as possible," he said, "not only for the American people but for those in foreign countries, too."

There is a possibility that the commission will soon release part of the long report prepared by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The commission statement today described this report on the Nov. 22 assassination as "five volumes of summary and exhibits."

The commission said it would have nothing to say about the F.B.I. findings now but indicated it might later. It said "a preliminary statement" would be "made public" after the members had a chance to look over the report.

Congress completed action today on a bill to give the commission subpoena power. The House passed the measure by voice vote without audible objection, as the Senate did yesterday. The bill now goes to President Johnson.

The measure permits the commission to grant immunity to witnesses. Such a grant would remove the opportunity to invoke the Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination. In short, witnesses could be effectively forced to testify.